



City of Brentwood aims to improve downtown development, parking

[Kyle Szymanski Staff Writer](#) - Jun 9, 2017

Amid stagnant development and a downtown parking shortage, the City of Brentwood is moving on plans to spur change.

The city council recently agreed to explore temporarily waiving its downtown parking in-lieu fee and parking standards for all prospective nonresidential projects, while moving forward with plans to hire a consultant to create a downtown parking management plan.

Since 2003, all new downtown development has been required to create a certain number of parking spaces according to square footage and other factors or pay \$3,748 per space not created. The collected funds could then be used by the city to address the need for additional parking.

“The current requirements reflect a direct deterrent to new development, and (it is) worth noting, since 2005, no new development has occurred downtown,” said Peggy Berglund, Brentwood senior analyst.

In-lieu fees totaling about \$21,000 were collected in 2004 and 2005 on the only two projects developed since the fee was instituted – the Valverde Building on First Street and a Victorian house on Brentwood Boulevard.

With interest, the fees have grown to \$28,000 and are now expected to be used to pay a consultant to create a downtown parking management plan.

“Downtown parking continues to be problematic and, owners believe, a detriment to businesses downtown,” Berglund said.

The consultant, who has not yet been hired, is expected to explore current and future parking capacity needs and short- and long-term solutions, said Gus Vina, city manager.

Donna Ross, owner of Cre’me Dela Gem Jewelry on First Street and a director of the Downtown Business Coalition, said the parking shortage is especially burdensome on downtown business customers, who at times have to park blocks away to visit the area.

“A lot of our customers complain they can’t find parking and they have to park out in the residential (area),” she said. “A lot of our clients are elderly, and they can’t walk that far. They need to park someplace within a block or so.”

Several factors contribute to limited parking spots, according to Ross. For one, the downtown building vacancy rate of about 1 percent means employees are increasingly taking up spots meant for customers. In addition, the two-hour limit of downtown parking locations is not consistently enforced. Also, the city hall parking garage a few blocks away from downtown is considered by some as too far to walk to visit the area.

“(Visitors) tend to avoid coming downtown if they don’t think they can get any parking,” Ross said.

In addition to the parking management plan, city officials hope that a temporary suspension of the in-lieu fee and parking standards on new development will increase the number of new downtown projects.

“The current regulations that we have are physically impossible, and the parking standards are prohibitive to economic growth and development and put an undue hardship on our businesses and owners downtown,” said City Councilman Joel Bryant.

The inhibiting nature of the fee came to a head recently when downtown property owner Manny Vierra proposed a 6,000-square-foot commercial project that would have required 22 onsite spaces or a payment of \$82,456 if those spots couldn’t be developed.

“Who would invest a million dollars to build a building downtown to improve that vacant lot and get attached with all these different fees?” Vierra said. “It doesn’t pencil; nobody can do it.”

Under the proposed plan, which must still be approved by the planning commission and brought back to the city council, all nonresidential projects would be exempt from paying the in-lieu fee or being required to include a certain number of parking spaces in their projects.

If the plan is approved, it’s expected the fee and parking space requirements would be suspended until the city council revamps its downtown specific plan, to be discussed during the council’s fall strategic planning session, Vina said. The specific plan was adopted in 2003 to guide growth and change downtown and ensure it grows to embody the community’s vision for a vibrant, active and beautiful city district.

City leaders say it’s too early to speculate when the parking management plan will be completed or when the development fee changes could take effect, but they hope both will enhance development and encourage visitors to the area.

“Most people would love to come downtown and spend some time there, but until we can help the businesses become more profitable, it’s a catch-22 for them,” Bryant said.